

Smarter CCTV attracts opposition and legal questions

report by Eugene Oscapella

PUBLIC OPPOSITION has forced Borders bookstores, at least temporarily, to stop browsing its customers' faces in two London stores. Meanwhile, in Australia, there is concern about a video camera pointing at a drug centre.

The technology, Smartface (FaceIt in the US), fights shoplifting by constantly comparing shoppers' "digital face maps" from the advanced surveillance system against a police database of known criminals. The images are reportedly discarded if there is no match.

Media reports of the system prompted both strong criticism and questions as to whether the technology infringed EU privacy and human rights law. Borders UK is seeking confirmation from Dectel – British suppliers of Smartface – that it complies with both laws.

The system is now being used by the US Immigration and Naturalization Service on the Mexican border, by the Israeli Army on the Gaza Strip, and by the London borough of Newham and the Birmingham police to help control crime.

However, a Jacksonville, Florida

city councillor recently launched legal action to prevent local law enforcement agencies from using the technology, arguing that it breaches privacy laws.

NSW COMMISSIONER TO INVESTIGATE SURVEILLANCE CAMERA

Australia's *Daily Telegraph* reported on July 19th that NSW Privacy Commissioner Chris Puplick has decided to investigate the placement of a surveillance camera outside Sydney's first "safe injection" facility. The Commissioner saw the camera during a recent visit to the facility, located in a Sydney Uniting Church building. The facility is designed to help injecting drug users prevent overdoses and the spread of disease among themselves and the general community. It has been operating since May.

The owner of a photography shop

next door to the site had his video camera pointed at the entrance to the site. The *Daily Telegraph* reported that the Uniting Church asked the owner to remove the camera or point it away from their door, and is considering legal action to have it removed amid concerns that clients could be intimidated from entering.

According to the newspaper, the use of the camera is not against the law, but the location and positioning may be illegal.



For further information on the Borders bookstore story, visit www.computerworld.com/storyba/0,4125,NAV47_STO63359,00.html



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